

South Sudan Rejects Deployment of Regional Protection Force amidst Worsening Security Situation



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would no longer accept the deployment of a 4,000-member Regional Protection Force (RPF), as provided for in United Nations Security Council [Resolution 2304](#), on the grounds that the security situation in the country had “[improved](#).” The RPF deployment, previously approved by the Government of South Sudan, was to provide a secure environment in and around Juba in light of the July 2016 episode of violence. Hundreds of civilians and soldiers were killed during that time. The January 2017 joint [report](#) by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS) revealed that “while some civilians died because they were caught in the crossfire, others appeared to have been deliberately targeted by the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA), Sudan People’s Liberation Movement– in Opposition (SPLM-IO), their affiliated armed forces and other armed men”.

Furthermore, UNMISS documented 217 rape cases including gang rape committed by SPLA, SPLM-IO and other armed groups during and after the fighting in July 2016. Victims’ testimonies and witnesses’ accounts indicate that most of the sexual violence cases were committed by SPLA soldiers, police officers and members of the National Security Services.

The RPF was authorized under UNSCR 2304 to use all necessary means, including undertaking robust action where necessary and active patrolling, to accomplish its mandate including to “promptly and effectively engage any actor that is credibly found to be preparing attacks against civilians, humanitarian actors, UN protection of civilian sites, UN personnel and premises.”

Rejection of the arms embargo resolution

The news regarding the rejection of the RPF by the Government of South Sudan was preceded by the Security Council’s rejection of a [resolution aimed at imposing an arms embargo and targeted sanctions](#) on government and opposition figures in South Sudan, on December 23rd, 2016. This rejection occurred, despite calls and warnings made by former UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, UN officials, civil society and humanitarian actors, of a risk of mass atrocities. The draft resolution garnered only seven votes in favor, out of the total 15 members. Amongst the abstainers were [Russia, China, Japan, Malaysia, Venezuela and all three African council members; Angola, Egypt and Senegal](#). Most Member States justified their abstention vote by the fact that signs of progress were being shown by the South Sudanese government; in particular in light of its, at the time, unconditional acceptance of the deployment of the regional protection force. However, the government’s announcement regarding its opposition to the deployment, radically shifts any sign of progress.

It is evident that the UN and the South Sudanese government are unable to implement what is critically needed to resolve the conflict in the world’s youngest nation. With the four-year long conflict still raging, the UN arms embargo and the additional RPF deployment were long-awaited measures to alleviate the situation. During the 16th anniversary of the UN Security Council

South Sudanese parliamentarian Betty Ogwaro expressed serious concern over the silence of the international community despite the worsening situation in her country. South Sudan confronts several internal wars: between the government and the SPLM-IO; with other armed groups; and a war of revenge among different ethnic groups.

The population no longer trusts the ability nor the will of the government to protect them. As a result, South Sudanese are arming themselves; and the circulation of firearms and light weapons is increasing. In light of this, Honorable Ogwaro called on the international community to provide support in controlling the circulation of small arms. She further stressed the need for an effective locally-based disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) program, to be implemented by the national government.

At the event, Ms. Rita Lopidia, Executive Director of the EVE Organization for Women Development presented the alarming humanitarian, socio-economic and political developments on the ground. According to her, the number of South Sudanese refugees in neighboring countries such as Kenya and Uganda, has now exceeded 1 million. Increasing sexual violence, looting and other forms of violence and harassment are driving people away from their homes. Dr. Jane Kani Edward, a South Sudanese professor called for an in-depth reform of the country's security sector institutions, during the panel discussion. The dire humanitarian situation is also affecting access to education. Many schools in the Juba area have closed because of the insecurity and the lack of necessary resources, she said.

All speakers at the panel discussion agreed that the best way to address the worsening situation in South Sudan is to fully and effectively implement the Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan (ARCISS) signed by the government and the SPLM-IO in August 2015. The arms embargo combined with awareness raising and promotion of ownership of the ARCISS in local communities would have been critical steps in implementing the peace agreement.

Civil society efforts to build peace

Amidst the lack of effective response from the South Sudanese government, the UN and regional actors, civil society organizations have sustained their peacebuilding efforts, particularly those that empower and amplify the voices of local communities and promote national dialogues. This was highlighted by participants at the Peace Dialogue on South Sudan organized by GNWP, EVE and the Consortium of Organizations for Women of South Sudan (CfW) in October 2016 in Nairobi, Kenya. Peace and human rights activists from civil society, academia, faith-based organizations along with representatives from the government, Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (JMEC) and foreign embassies took part in the Peace Dialogue to identify immediate and practical actions to achieve peace and stability in South Sudan. Some of their recommendations were: translate the peace

in a situation where the national government is barely functioning, where people have lost trust in their government, and interventions by regional and international multilateral institutions have been ineffective, it is crucial to support local initiatives and work with civil society actors who implement community-based conflict prevention and conflict resolution strategies. These were the messages highlighted at the Peace Dialogue in Nairobi and the panel discussion in New York.

In Winnipeg, Canada, on November 12, 2016, the Institute for International Women's Rights Manitoba and the Rotary Peace Partners in collaboration with GNWP organized the Women's Peace Table on South Sudan where many of the participants were South Sudanese in the diaspora. The discussions focused on the role of women in peacebuilding in South Sudan. One of the standout issues of the debate was the lack of childcare and homecare services provided to women in the country to allow them to engage in activism and politics.

Engaging with the diaspora was also a recommendation made by Dr. Jane Kani Edward during the October 2016 GNWP panel discussion. She stressed the need to promote national cohesion and a sense of identity. According to her, the lack of cohesion explains the deep ethnic division in the South Sudanese society. She further called on South Sudanese authorities and the African Union to expedite the establishment of the Hybrid Court of South Sudan, following OHCHR's recommendation to investigate and prosecute human rights violations committed in the country by security forces. The issue of impunity is a longstanding problem in South Sudan and according to the OHCHR it has "[contributed to repeated cycles of violence](#)" in the country; thus the importance of prosecuting those responsible.

The rejection of the arms embargo resolution by the Security Council and now the rejection of the RPF by the Government of South Sudan are a major blow to the efforts to achieve peace and stability in the country. Some South Sudanese civil society actors equate this with the reinforcement of the status quo, defeat of democracy and acceptance of dictatorship.

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